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Education: An Essential Aspect for the Future of Climate Change Prevention

Climate change is a topic of continuous debate in lecture halls, news channels, and between different political parties. Unfortunately, it has become a critical problem in our day and age, and it is crucial that we find ways to minimize our overall carbon footprint in an attempt to reduce the negative effects of global warming. Despite the growing urgency to reduce or slow down the process of climate change in the twenty-first century, the majority of the world's population does not take the initial steps toward reducing anthropogenic climate change, a major global issue that needs to be prioritized. While climate change and its effects have encouraged the use of renewable energy resources such as wind turbines, solar panels, and renewable energy plants in place of nonrenewable resources harmful to our environment—such as coal plants—our ecosystem continues a downward trend. In this essay, I summarize some of the evidence on the impacts of carbon emissions on the environment. I argue that it is imperative that awareness is brought to the importance of preserving the ecosystem through education. In fact, if the world's nations continue on this irreversible path of poor ecomanagement and unsustainable lifestyles, our ecosystem will be irreversibly endangered.

Global warming, although a critically important topic, is generally not talked about in our everyday lives, but rather only becomes part of the conversation when it is threatening or endangering individuals at a personal level. Public opinions are a crucial influence on the policies made in an attempt to prevent climate change and prepare for the impact of the damage

already done. School systems, especially in the United States, typically focus on the past and history rather than on the future and on current-day world issues. Yet, countries around the world also need to do more to implement climate change criteria into their school systems. According to the United Nations, education is crucial to accelerate climate action and preparation. A study found that “less than 40% of countries surveyed by a recent UNESCO report include climate change-related issues in school curricula” (Education Crucial). Moreover, school districts can remodel the way in which their buildings and infrastructure are run in order to make them greener. According to Allison Anderson, a nonresident fellow with the Brookings Institution Center for Universal Education, “education plays a vital role in bringing about behavioral change, and schools can play an important part by becoming carbon neutral, energy efficient and reducing their own ecological footprint” (Anderson). Our society as a whole needs to normalize conversations about global warming and integrate these into our education systems in order to properly inform more individuals about the dangers of anthropogenic climate change. If individuals were educated on climate change at a young age, they would be able to take the initiative to lessen their individual carbon emissions. Furthermore, education facilities should be modeled with a more conscientious design to reduce their carbon emissions and nonrenewable resources.

Climate change is a globally known issue that has directly affected a number of countries. Nevertheless, people still vary in their opinions toward this issue. Following a study done by Yale University, a Climate Opinion Map was created with the results from various survey questions administered individually to a sizable sample of Americans. The outcome of the surveys showed that Americans’ opinions on the severity of climate change differ from city to city in the United States. However, when participants were asked if they discuss global warming

at least occasionally, 64% said they never discuss it and 36% replied that they discuss it at least occasionally. Additionally, when they were asked if they hear about global warming in the media at least once a week, an overwhelming 77% replied saying that they hear about it in the media less than once a month (Marlon et al.). These results reveal the very small media coverage given to climate change. In order to truly take preventative steps towards a greener earth, climate change needs to become a regular topic of discussion. In order for this to occur, individuals must be approached in a way that makes them concerned for their own personal well-being. The gruesome effects of anthropogenic climate change may need to hold the spotlight for individuals to open their eyes to the reality of global warming. This approach is harsh but necessary to directly influence individuals to take steps to lead an eco-friendly lifestyle sooner rather than later.

If the serious topic of climate change—more specifically, anthropogenic climate change—is implemented into our education systems and becomes a normal topic of conversation, it will motivate individuals in our society and our population as a whole to lessen their carbon emissions. There are numerous ways to reduce your carbon footprint and a majority of them are simple and easy to work into a busy lifestyle that finds any alteration challenging. A carbon footprint is the amount of carbon dioxide and other carbon compounds emitted due to the consumption of fossil fuels by a particular person or group. According to an article written by the New York Times editorial staff, simple things such as driving less and taking the train or a bike instead, eating less meat, and making sure to turn off all lights and electrical appliances when they're not in use are positive steps towards reducing your personal carbon emissions (Albeck-Ripka). Surprisingly, eating less meat, especially reducing your intake of red meat, can be especially beneficial to a greener, healthier lifestyle. According to the University of Michigan's

Center for Sustainable Systems, “a vegetarian diet greatly reduces an individual’s carbon footprint but switching to less carbon intensive meats can have a major impact as well. For example, replacing all beef consumption with chicken for one year leads to an annual carbon footprint reduction of 882 pounds CO₂” (“Carbon Footprint Factsheet”). This information reiterates how impactful small changes in your everyday routine can be to the reduction of your carbon emissions. If the education systems encouraged knowledge of climate change in our youth, small steps such as eating less meat would become a normal routine that doesn’t involve extensive work yet helps to protect the environment from further damage.

If people chose to cut down on their carbon emissions, this change would not only benefit the environment but also our physical health. A documentary titled *Uprising* produced by National Geographic (2017) investigates the direct relationship between nonrenewable energy resources, specifically coal plants, and the effect their emissions have on the physical health of the residents surrounding the plant. America Ferrera, an actor and activist, appears as the narrator in this documentary and advocates for coal plants to be retired and replaced with renewable energy resources. Ferrera visits the town of Waukegan, Illinois and speaks to the citizens that live in proximity to the Waukegan coal plant in order to interview them about their feelings on the plant. A family appears on camera discussing their problematic health concerns that they strongly believe have been caused by the nearby coal plant. Complications such as trouble breathing and asthma were the symptoms that the mother and son who live within walking distance of the working coal plant had in common (*Uprising*, 10:20). This type of respiratory issue has been documented as prevalent in the proximity of this type of plant. This and other similar testimonies show that, although it is still a profitable business industry, it is clear we should make efforts to move toward a more resourceful and sustainable economy, moving away

from energy sources such as coal plants. This alarming connection is an incentive for citizens to advocate for sustainable energy resources for the sake of both their physical health and the environment. Moreover, the threat to physical health helps motivate people to partake in the simple steps listed in the preceding paragraphs, in an attempt to lead a healthier lifestyle for them and their families. If we start with small, personal improvements these can collectively make a large impact and persuade people to strive to make larger changes, such as advocating for the retirement of coal plants.

Everyday climate change is altering the way we live and is constantly changing our ecosystem. Over the course of many years, our education system has become a space where our young spend the bulk of their daily lives at a time of life when they are forming their own opinions and ideologies. This structure isn't an option but rather a necessity. Due to the substantial role education plays on the younger generations, I believe that in order for climate change to become a regular topic of discussion, education systems across the globe need to do more to insert climate change into the school curriculum. If youth are exposed to the alarming reality of global warming, they have a greater incentive to take action to reduce their carbon footprint throughout their life. This exposure to climate change raises educated youth that promote a sustainable economy with their actions, such as eating less meat or riding their bike more often than driving a car. Furthermore, it influences individuals to advocate for renewable energy resources that are not harmful to their physical health or the environment. Education pushes youth to become activists like America Ferrera and fight against harmful emission releasers, such as the Waukegan coal plant, and fight for the installation of renewable resources, such as wind turbines and solar energy. Climate change cannot be reversed, and the damage is permanent, however preventative steps can be taken on both small and large scales to avoid

further damage to our ecosystem. Educating our youth can help with the small-scale personal changes, as presented in this paper. Additionally, the same youth can contribute to changing large scale policies and laws that will help reverse the devastating effects of climate change once and for all. I hope that in this short paper I have made a case for the importance of educating younger generations on the complex and urgent issue that is climate change and the impact of carbon emissions on our ecosystem.

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